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ABSTRACT

This paper, which is based on the assumption that conceptualization is a necessary first-order task of theory construction, discusses the utility of a particular explicit definition of "development." Previous definitions of development have been hampered by a variety of weaknesses, and most current definitions are not conducive to a comparative perspective. The definition of "development" utilized in this paper is "a process or set of processes characterized by (a) the consequence of general sustained economic growth, and (b) sets of natural, human, technological, cultural, financial, and organizational conditions." Two questions will help expedite the utility of this definition: (1) Development for whom?--who is paying the costs and who is receiving the benefits?; and (2) What is the simultaneous or sequential mix, balance, or combination of conditions which is associated with the structural change or changes which have occurred? Some advantages of the definition are described, including the noteworthy one that the discipline of sociology may receive the greatest benefit or advantage from usage of the definition. (DB)

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A SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW OF 'DEVELOPMENT'*

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A Sociological View of "Development"[1]

by

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Conceptualization as a Necessary Path to Theory Construction

Rural sociologists have expended considerable effort on "community development", and such apparently related areas as "economic development", "rural development", and, more recently, "regional planning" or "regional development". Nevertheless, the theory-building utility of such effort has been short of its potentiality.[2] Unfortunately, Coulombe and Gagnon's (1964:3) evaluation is still up-to-date: the construction of "a general theory of social and economic development is certainly the most urgent task."[3] This paper, which is based on the assumption that conceptualization is a necessary first-order task of theory construction, discusses the utility of a particular explicit definition of development. The intent of this discussion is heuristic: the author invites others to empirically delineate the utility of this or other definitions in order that theory construction will have an increasingly common focal point.

Previous definitions of development have been hampered by a variety of weaknesses. The most obvious is to use an adjective before the term development itself. Thus, various types of development pervade the literature: examples include "community development", "rural development", "economic development", "regional development", "urban development", "human resource development", "economic resource development", and "natural resource development". This conceptual parade is confusing,

obsolete, and impractical in that the task of attempting to conceptualize the dialectic essential to the process of development is ignored (Horowitz, 1967:431). Instead of explicit definitions of development, the literature shows that the various types of development "include" such things as services, jobs, economic activity, or an improved social and physical environment (e.g., C.S.R.S., 1970:1; President's Task Force on Rural Development, 1970: 1-8). Even when an explicit definition of one of these various types of development is provided, any reference to the dialectic is conspicuously absent. For example, the Cooperative State Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (1970:1) defines "rural development" as "a complex process leading to a greater social and economic well-being for people and their community". In brief, although development is a worldwide problem, most current definitions are not conducive to a comparative perspective.

Another weakness of previous definitions of one type of development or another is to the prevalence of assumptions about the nature of man and society. For example, the definition of rural development as a process with the purpose of improving the "decision-making ability of community leaders resulting in social, economic and human development" (Eldridge, 1970:2) may be naive in that an improvement in decision-making ability of the members of the power structure or of the poor is not necessarily related to any improvement in the latter's level of living.[4] Once again, the question "Development for whom?" seems relevant to the idea of a dialectic endemic to the development process.

Another weakness underlying the array of various types of so-called

definitions of development is the lack of a term which can be used to refer to whatever needs to be manipulated or changed. Such a term is needed to specify the structural transformation(s) which is associated with the process of development. Nevertheless, Wallace, Hobbs, and Vlasin (1969:iii) have recently asserted that resources are the basic ingredients necessary for enhancing the life chances and growth opportunities of localities.

A related weakness is the ambiguous or missing reference to macroanalytical or microanalytical effects of changes in the economic structure. Since an increase in the total amount of resources in an area does not necessarily mean that various specific individuals or groups receive any benefit from this change, a useful definition of development would focus on the conditions in which various types of costs are paid and various types of benefits are received by specific individuals or groups. Theoretically, the level of living of individuals can also be improved by an improvement in the productivity of resources. Thus, information on the set of conditions associated with such change is a worthwhile focal point of the referent of the concept development. Although it is possible that individuals can enjoy life more without an increase in their purchasing power, the relationship between increased income and a higher level of living is likely to be very important for any territoriality or people living or working within it.

Another shortcoming of previous efforts to conceptualize development is a common failure to depict the apparently crucial relationship between local leadership on the one hand and economic growth or an increased level of living on the other. Especially since bringing new

resources into the area is a common means for local economic growth, information is needed about the initiative or effort expended by local leaders to establish and maintain federal, state, and local programs.[6]

Conditions Related to Development

The occurrence and rate of development depends upon various sets or categories of conditions. Much recent attention has been directed toward the quasi-Malthusian concern of the relationship between demographic and living conditions. Although it is axiomatic that a larger population provides a larger financial base for a wider array of services than does a smaller population (Hoffer, 1964:30), regionalism offers a potential minimization of the extent to which nonmetropolitan areas are at a comparative disadvantage with metropolitan areas. That population size itself is insufficient for understanding why a particular area grows or the residents are generally satisfied living there is supported by current commuting patterns: Many Americans who can afford to are willing to reside in the suburbs, small towns, or in the open country miles from what many view as the "necessary congestion" of a central place to work.[7] At the same time, access to various services is important to these commuters. Similarly, the interests of resident taxpayers and non-resident taxpayers may be at odds. Because local leaders likely recognize these and other situations involving potential conflict, it would be useful to know which local leaders, if any, are supporting or opposing local policies designed to make new or existing housing or real estate available to "outsiders". Also, there may be considerable controversy whether the residents and/or non-residents view the area as over-popu-

lated, under-populated, or neither over- nor under-populated. Thus, definitive information is needed on successful or aborted attempts at implementing deliberate changes in traditional or well-established housing or residential patterns within various geographical areas.

The general financial condition of an area is important for both economic growth and the provision of services. More specifically, information is needed on both the amount and type of financial resources in the area. While the amount of local wealth or income of the area's residents cannot be ignored, we know that substantial sums of "outside" money or capital are often needed to help the area's economy "take-off" and reach a plateau of sustained growth. Given this, information is needed on the size and growth of local banks, credit unions, savings and loan associations and other local organizations which channel these resources to entrepreneurs and other local people. Information is also needed on the reputation or prestige of the individuals occupying top positions in these organizations. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that local bankers want a community or area to grow as much and as quickly as it can: there may be a consensus among the local bankers that only a limited amount of credit needs to be expended toward any investments which represent, potentially or actually, expansion of the manufacturing or services sectors. That is to say that the bankers may want the community to remain an agricultural or agri-business center.

In a post-industrial society such as the United States it is difficult to separate the financial from the technological or the organizational conditions of an area. To be sure, much credit, money, or

capital is expended for the acquisition or use of new machines and/or for the personnel who can use, demonstrate, and/or promote the utility of such technology. One the other hand, it is also recognized that technological change is closely related to the level of competition of similar firms within the same trade or service area. Accordingly, the following information on organizations exemplifies the type that is needed in order to understand the relationship between the various types of organizational inputs, through-puts, and outputs in an area on the one hand and sustained economic growth or the provision of services on the other: (1,2,3) private and public support of a local Chamber of Commerce, of a local industrial commission, and of a local industrial park; (4) number of local banks; (5) number of local savings and loan associations; (6) value of deposits of local banks; (7) value of deposits of local savings and loan associations; (8) support and degree of participation of local residents in community- or area-wide programs or projects; (9) public awareness of Councils of Governments and other multipurpose multijurisdictional entities concerned with regionalism; and (10) the involvement of local leaders in regional planning and development programs or projects. Put differently, definitive information is needed on the extent to which individuals and public or private organizations actually support community-wide activities such as industrial promotion or the establishment of a park. Although the need for organizational techniques or skills is now acknowledged to be related to various forms of planned change, little is known about which structures are more effective for what types of goal attainment in various environmental settings.

The overall cultural condition of an area may not be reflected by information on what individuals or organizations are doing to promote or abort general, sustained economic growth or the provision of services. Such factual information may indicate little or nothing about the evaluative or normative dimensions of what is being done or being planned. It is also necessary to know what local residents -- organizational members or not -- think or feel about what is or is not being done through community- or area-wide projects, programs, or activities: what is the extent of the gap between values and goals on the one hand and specific structures dedicated to accomplishing goals on the other? Accordingly, the most active individuals and/or organizations may be more powerful than popular. The extent to which interstitial structures represent the interests of others cannot be overlooked.[8] Thus, it is important to determine the extent to which local projects, programs, and activities meet the current or future needs, problems, and interests of various individuals, groups, or organizations.

The explicit identification of most of the general types of structural conditions which likely affect the general, sustained economic growth or the provision of services in an area was not intended merely as an academic exercise. Rather, it was an attempt to underscore the point that sociologists have a critical challenge and an excellent opportunity to empirically delineate which structures are comparatively more or less effective and why. It is important to note that the attempt to gather and communicate information on the comparative effectiveness of the same or similar types of social structures will not suffice for

initial efforts to build a theory of "social and economic development." It is also necessary to focus on emergent structures and the potential effectiveness of currently nonexistent structures.[9] Put differently, there is an imperative need for multiple sets of means-ends foci: (1) on what did exist, (2) on what does exist, (3) on what is currently emerging, and (4) on what does not currently exist but could -- what structural configurations have been, are, or might be effective in various environmental settings.[10] These foci need to be directed at the socio-cultural variations in the definitions of community, growth, organization, leadership, and citizen participation.

Development Defined

Development is defined as a process or set of processes characterized (a) by the consequence of general sustained economic growth[11] and (b) by sets of natural, human, technological, cultural, financial, and organizational conditions.[12] Two questions will help expedite the utility of this definition: (1) Development for whom? -- Who is paying the costs and who is receiving the benefits?; and (2) What is the simultaneous or sequential mix, balance, or combination of conditions[13] which is associated with the structural change or changes which have occurred?

Some Advantages of the Definition

One advantage of this definition is that is can be understood by social scientists in general -- not just by economists or sociologists. Moreover, the definition can be understood by laymen. Although the definition can be understood by scientists and laymen alike, it avoids

the ambiguity of many definitions: the referents of the concept are not only delineated but also categorized or typed into an end (i.e., general, sustained economic growth) and types of means (i.e., conditions) affecting the same. Nevertheless, the real test of any concept is its utility. Consequently, the above definition will hopefully be heuristic -- it will be a useful tool for researchers. The first-order challenge is for sociologists to build a theoretical and empirical base. This can be accomplished by comparing and sharing information about the structural changes associated with various structural configurations and mixes of various structural conditions operative in various geographical and temporal settings.

The definition also helps illuminate several concepts which are at least nominally related to the concept development. The concepts "undeveloped", "underdeveloped", "developing", or "over-developed" make reference to the general stage of development of a given area. Unfortunately, no reference is made to means-ends distinctions or to set of conditions related to structural change or phenomena impeding the same. These nominally-related concepts have the limited utility of an apparently objectively-derived summary label for the level and rate of economic development that has already occurred. To the extent that such concepts facilitate an over-emphasis on past goal-attainment levels and an under-emphasis or neglect of present vs future means-ends foci, the above definition is a complement, if not a substitute.

Another advantage of the definition is its explicit acknowledgement that cultural conditions may favor or oppose the sometimes unquestioned

goal of general, sustained economic growth or the provision of more services. A gap between the actual and the given reasons for opposing or supporting a change can be expected. For example, individuals who oppose industrialization may say that the community or area will suffer from the concomitant introduction of traffic congestion, noise or pollution. In actuality, the most critical threat may be organized labor or the loss of local power. Thus, it is not necessarily true that the economic or political effects of general, sustained economic growth are the most critical from a cultural viewpoint. A consideration of cultural conditions can be especially fruitful if answers are sought to two fundamental questions: (1) What constitutes a viable community? and (2) What constitutes a viable ecomony? Although the former question appears to be a more social-cultural query than the latter, answers to both may help identify community or area attributes. Such a focus will be useful if it empirically explores the accusation or judgment that the concept community is culture-bound or emotionally laden and actually is a subjectively-derived summary label for the aggregated social effects of development: communities and areas can be categorized or typed on the basis of the scope and type of programs or projects in such goal or target areas as housing, recreation, or industrialization.

The definition permits a theoretical-empirical focus that helps conceptualize development as an aggregate outcome or effect of multiple fields constituted by structural configurations and mixes of conditions that support or abort programs, projects, and other apparent forms of planned change. Given this focus, several answers to several related

but distinct questions can be obtained: (1) "Is development occurring?"; (2) "What intra- and inter-regional variations occur in the amount of local development?"; (3) "What intra- and inter-regional variations occur in the types of concomitant forces (i.e., structural configurations and mixes of conditions) giving local development direction?"; and (4) "What intra- and inter-regional variations occur in the concomitant forces opposing or hindering local development?" The consequences of local programs or projects that embody regional, state, or federal as well as local inputs will likely be a fruitful focus for evaluating the aggregate effects of macro- and micro-level efforts at locally-articulated goals such as a general, sustained economic growth or the provision of services.

It is noteworthy that the discipline of sociology may receive the greatest benefit or advantage from a usage of the above definition. If the definition is viewed as an analytical tool for an empirical focus on the gap between values, social structures, and goal attainment, then the boundary maintenance of the respective proponents of the conflict, symbolic-interactional, or structural-functional schools with sociology seems ridiculous or unproductive. Indeed, the interesting merit of the definition is its explicit encouragement of such proponents to empirically document which of their concepts offer the most utility for explicating the linkages among the three dimensions of the above-mentioned gap. Such enterprise, however, is not the sacred domain reserved for sociologists. Rather, the enterprise is important enough that others -- regardless of professional credentials or labels -- may not be convinced

that professional sociologists are needed. Regardless of who is involved, it is likely that the enterprise will be effective to the extent that it examines not only (a) what structures effectively accomplish which economic or social goals but also (b) under which mixes of conditions specific emergent or future structures effectively accomplish specific current or future economic or social goals.[14]

The above definition invites sociologists and others to do more than construct descriptive profiles of cities, counties, and multi-county areas from secondary sources. The need for personal interviews, private and public documents, participant observation, and case studies of which individuals and organizations facilitated or obstructed structural effectiveness in normal and in crisis or emergency situations is obvious. The latter set of techniques will be needed to delineate the concomitant and sequential (a) structural configurations and (b) mixes of conditions related to development. Moreover, multi-variate techniques can be used to examine the interrelationship, if any, among a large number of variables related to such configurations and conditions. Furthermore, variables used to measure the number and type of natural resources, physical facilities, and human resources can be held constant in order to get at the more social dimensions of individuals and organizational correlates of development.

Figure 1 is presented in order to help illustrate many of the relationships discussed above. Like the definition of development itself, the diagram attempts to depict the structural and processual dimensions of development. Private voluntary associations, business or business-related corporations, and voluntary associations of public officials

are posed as three types of organizational entities that represent different interests and/or clientele. The quality of life in an area or territory is seen as an aggregate condition affected by such factors as personal satisfaction, jobs, income, facilities, and the availability of various services or amenities. Projects and programs are posed as key variables intervening between those whose interests are supposedly being represented by organizations through goal formulation and pursuit on the one hand and such dependent variables as income, jobs, and the existence or provision of specific services on other forms of goal attainment on the other. Although it is recognized that a complete consensus is unlikely, there seems to be some merit to the notion that a general condition variable such as the extent of poverty in an area can be used as a proxy for the overall socio-economic effect of organizational configurations operative in an area. The latter, in turn, can be conceptualized as an important component of the quality of life in an area. Comparing areas which have similar structural configurations and mixes of conditions as enumerated above on the one hand and substantially different incidences of poverty on the other seems like a promising point to start.

It is important to observe that the diagram attempts to depict structural relationships and not the content of what is exchanged through such relationships. Various types of resources are exchanged. The form of the exchange and its meaning to the individuals whose interests are being represented are important. Accordingly, communication about the effects or consequences of exchanges and information about the

ability to have a delegate represent one's interests are relevant foci for research on development.

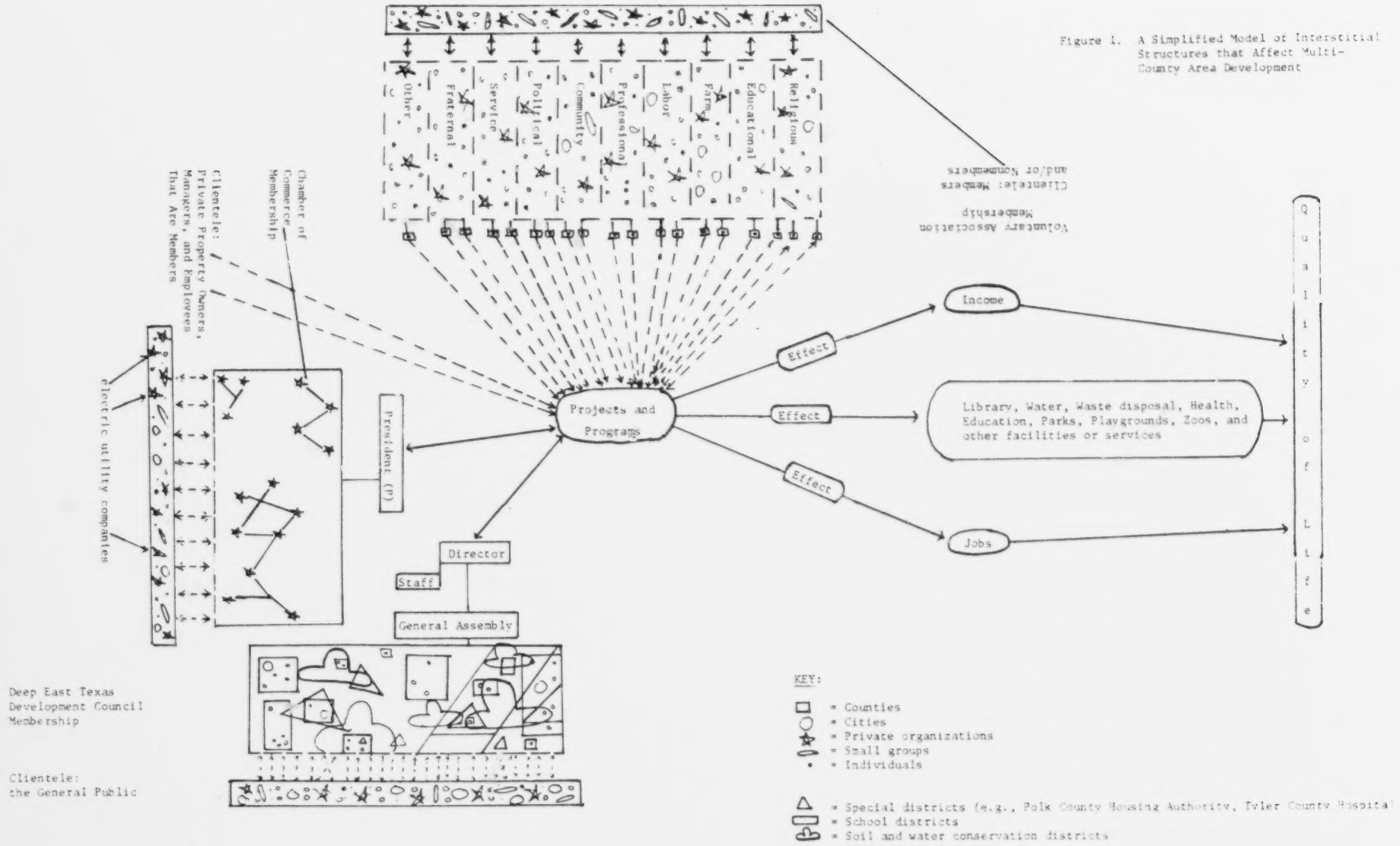

Figure 1. A Simplified Model of Interstitial Structures that Affect Multi-County Area Development

FOOTNOTES

[1]The author gratefully acknowledges (1) the helpful comments which his colleagues Ruth Schaffer, James Copp, Kevin R. Stowers, Rod Martin, David Ruesink, W. Kennedy Upham, Stanley Wilson and Raymond Prewitt made to an earlier version of the paper; and (2) the fruitful dialogue that the author has had with his colleague Harold Kaufman during the past year; however, the author assumes full responsibility for any errors in the paper.

[2]This weakness has apparently been noticeable for some time. For example, Hoffsommer (1960:181) noted over a decade ago that rural sociologists have been much criticized for too much "problem" and too little theoretical orientation.

[3]A highly related point is made by Peter (1966:2): "Social scientists agree that there is at present no satisfactory general theory of social change." Similarly, Wallace (1969:17) states that "no definitive theory of economic growth and development has evolved from our profession's accumulated attempts at deriving one."

[4]For the idea that a given community does not necessarily have enough wealth to redistribute, see Kahn (1970:16).

[5]It is important to note that many non-material or physical resources, including companionship and affection, are commonly exchanged. If the medium of exchange is not material or physical then reciprocity is involved, whether the actors realize it or not at that point in time.

[6]The Southern Task Force on Rural Development asserts that the lack of participation in federal, state, and local programs by local people representing minority and disadvantaged groups must be overcome.

[7]It is recognized that the technological capability already exists for a large number of individuals to live in one part of the country and work for a firm which has its headquarters in another part; nevertheless, this is not the predominant work-residence pattern now.

[8]Interstitial structures are those entities which have a responsibility for representing the goals and interests of one or more other individuals, groups, or organizations who do not have a direct input into one or more decision-making processes.

[9]According to Capener and Brown (1968:1), "Sociologists have, by tradition confined themselves to controlled observation and interpre-

tation of what is, rather than what should be."

[10]Peter (1966:14) noted that the fundamental criterion of a general theory is contextuality. The means are social structures, each of which is primarily formal or primarily informal; the ends are interests needs, or problems, each of which may be less than fully re-articulated in the form of goals.

[11]Although there is more to economic growth than industrial growth or development the potential for industrialization in areas seeking sustained economic growth is well demonstrated; for example, Hoffer (1964:27) notes that industrial development is a community-wide interest, "it can be generally assumed that industrial expansion provides the basis for prosperity -- more employment and more trade."

[12]The term general is included in order to explicitly acknowledge that exceptions are likely.

[13]The critical importance of consensus on what type of social structures are desirable and/or desired has been documented by Kammerer, et.al., (1963:195): "The existence of conflict over the question of 'what kind of town shall ours be' ....is a conflict of interests of such scope and depth that it normally cannot be contained within the confines of a single leadership clique."

[14]An example of the importance of futurology is Piganoil's (1969: 522) observation that companies are coming into existence which hope to make a living by "selling" their theories about the future.

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